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"CHRISTMAS IN DIXIE DURING THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES"

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"CHRISTMAS IN DIXIE DURING THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES"

Written at the Request of Miss Martha Haywood  
President of Manly's Battery Children of the Confederacy

By

Mrs. A. J. Ellis - Raleigh, North Carolina  
Historian Johnston Pettigrew Chapter

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As my home during the War of the Sixties was out in the country, I am afraid I am not able to give a very interesting account of the Christmases of those days. But, as you and Manly's Battery are so near to my heart, I will try to scribble for you my recollections to the best of my ability.

My home at that time was out on my father's plantation about twelve miles west of Raleigh near the villages of Morrisville and Cary. I might say we had a college bred neighborhood for there were several graduates from Chapel Hill, Wake Forest, Columbian College, Harvard and other institutions whose wives were educated at Salem, Oxford, St. Mary's, Greensboro, Murphreysboro, etc. Which means, we had a good first class neighborhood school in charge of competent teachers. Besides these of "noble learning", we had other citizens who stood for the upbuilding and the better welfare of their community. I do not believe anything is more conducive to kind neighborly friendship than a good school. We mention this to explain that ours was such a community section that one of us can hardly give our own Christmas experiences without bringing in all the rest.

Awhile before Christmas hog killing time came on. This was anticipated with almost as much pleasure as Christmas itself, especially among the little folks. You see that meant a number of bladders to be blown up. Each child had a bladder, little colored children and all. These bladders were



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blown up with a reed quill, and when inflated to the fullest extent were tied tightly with a string and hung up somewhere 'till Christmas morning when they were somehow brought in contact with heat, and then such loud reports! I think the "Bladder Bustin'", on Christmas morning was our biggest and most enjoyable thrill.

From hog killing time 'till a few days before Christmas all minds, souls and bodies were turned toward our soldier boys off in camp. Old and young, male and female, black and white, were busy preparing boxes to give them as much Christmas cheer as possible. I will say, in the meantime, that our neighbors had good farms on which they raised almost everything necessary for support. We had corn meal, flour, bacon, beef, mutton, turkeys, chickens, ducks, guineas, milk and butter, eggs, fruit, vegetables, peanuts and for sweetening we had sorghum and sometimes, somehow, the housewives managed to get through the blockade a little sugar and some genuine coffee. So you see it was not so difficult to get up a fine collection of goodies as we might suppose. Of course this was not possible in the invaded regions, but this did not happen to our section 'till about the close of the war. Of all the bread, cake and pie baking, to say nothing of all the good hams, chickens, turkeys, sausage, spareribs, back-bones. In fact there were all kinds of meats, potatoes and everything that could tempt the appetite of hungry soldiers. Besides all of these good eatables there were other boxes containing gloves, socks, helmets, home-woven woollen undergarments and well, about everything that could be packed up. Then Mr. Jacob Satterfield, a good kind neighborhood and a carpenter by trade, who was not considered physically able to go out on the firing line, was engaged, expenses paid, to take all these things to Captain Weatherspoon's Company. Nearly all of them were our neighbors. Those who were not just had to share with those who were. Mr.

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Satterfield said there was enough for three good meals for the whole company and not all gone when he left. Mr. Satterfield finally entered the war anyhow but never returned alive. I remember that something like that Christmas remembrance occurred every Christmas throughout the war.

No, for the homefolks. I think every family had a good Christmas dinner and if any did not they were invited to join those who did. So, all the older people had a good time Christmas week socially as well as enjoying the good eating. Parties and "candy pullings" were given the children 'till all of them had about all the pleasure and fun they could stand. "Candy pullings" of sorghum, (which made delicious candy) were sources of the greatest enjoyment. As soon as hickory nuts began to drop we children began to pick them up and store them away squirrel-fashion till we had bushels of them. Walnuts were also hulled and dried. We had all these to add to our festivities. "Popcorn Poppins" were also in vogue along then. Then, we played games and had lots of fun generally.

Now, we come to the grown up young people, where the climax was reached. There was sure to be a number of our soldier boys at home on Holiday furloughs. There were quilting and other kinds of parties - sometimes a wedding, to which the young men and young ladies as well as older people were invited. You just ought to have seen the supper tables. The best white table linen was spread out, cut-glass, silver and "Sunday" real china were all in place, and the decorations were beautiful to behold. Cedar all powdered white somehow with flour; also the hydrangea blooms dried by this time were all powdered white and looked like great white snow-balls. All these white beauties were interspersed with the green holly full of red berries and with frosted cakes, quivering jellies, store candies and glasses of syllabub, all rested among these evergreens and white things. When lighted up with candles in silver on highly polished brass candlesticks, they





defied all description. Back in pantries or on side-boards or side tables, ready to be passed around were meats, such as hams, chicken, turkey, barbecue, besides custards and cakes of every description. These were fully enjoyed. Frosted cakes were useful as well as ornamental. Syllabub, of which there was usually a generous supply, was not only ornamental in the pretty glass stands, but exceedingly palatable as well.

The pretty young ladies in their beautiful home-spun dresses, all made up and trimmed with quantities of button covered with contrasting material and other pretty handmade decorations, were so charming that no wonder they scorned to wear a bit of silk or a bit of Northern lace". The young men in spite of the wail of the "poor ragged Confederate soldiers" managed to be all dressed up in new fresh looking uniforms all resplendent in gold lace and shiney buttons. After supper they danced the old fashioned Virginia Reel, Scotch ramble, London Bridge, or played games, such as marching around singing, "O, sister Pheobe, how merry were we the night we sat under the young June apple tree", or "When I lived in the State of Virginia to Carolina I did go; There I saw a handsome lady, Oh, her name I did not know". Stealing partners and other amusements enlivened the occasion.

We must not forget to pay our respects to persimmon beer, a famous Southern beverage. This beer really began back in the summer during the fruit drying time. The good sound apple peelings were nicely dried, sacked up and hung out in the dairy for beer-making just before Christmas. A large water-tight barrel was procured, the bottom lined with straw on which were deposited these apple-peelings, persimmons, baked and mashed sweet potatoes, baked "seconds" and locusts ("locuses", according to the children and colored people). The barrel was then filled with boiling water and left for awhile to ferment. When it had fully "worked" it was drawn out at a pigot, and no imported French wines could touch the kind Uncle Bob made,



with a forty foot pole", as a delicious beverage. Christmas mornings most people had egg-nog which was not considered improper that long ago, but as my parents were strictly temperate, nothing stronger than persimmon beer was allowed at our house. So, I have never seen any egg-nog even to this day. This is a true picture of Christmas in my neighborhood during the War between the States.

One Christmas about the most notable event, I suppose I might say, among the little folks was my doll wedding. The "contracting parties" being Johnny Rosemond and Theodosia Ernest. They were a couple of the largest and most beautiful dolls ever seen about there. They were manufactured for me by my very dear friend, as well as one of the finest women in the world, Mrs. Rufus H. Jones. The faces were pen and ink sketches by Mr. Rufus Jones, an honor graduate of the University of North Carolina. Theodosia Ernest took her name from the heroine of a novel that was very popular about that time. Back in those days a middle aged gentleman by the name of John Rosemond lived out on the road between here and Cary. He was an exile from Poland and was said to have been of very high rank in his native country. So my boy doll being rather fat and dumpy was named for him whom he was supposed to resemble. The bride's dress was an "heirloom" being made of a white cross-armed muslin apron my mother seemed to have no further use for. It is not customary to describe the groom's dress on such occasions, but as Johnny Rosemond's was rather unusual, I may be pardoned for digressing a little just one time.

Mrs. William Merritt of Chatham County, the mother of Mrs. Jones who made the dolls, was an intimate friend of Mrs. Matthew T. Yates, wife of the distinguished Baptist Missionary to China. After Mrs. Yates had spent some time in China she sent her friend Mrs. Merritt a pair of Chinese dolls elegantly dressed in Chinese costume, to give her an idea of how the Chinese





ressed. These dolls were accidentally broken. So she sent the clothes to Blanche, Mrs. Jones's little girl, and me. The girl's dress just fitted Rosabel, Blanche's doll, but as I did not have a boy doll Mrs. Jones made me one to fit the Chinese boy's dress. This turned out to be his wedding garment. It consisted of brown brocade silk trousers, a long tunic of pale blue brocade silk, and a short navy blue taffeta silk jacket made kimono fashion, and all the fastenings were black silk braid with gilt buttons. The cap was of some black serge looking stuff. These dolls were as much as 20 inches tall. Away back in those days such things were exceedingly interesting as we did not often see anything from China. Mrs. William Merritt who sent us the doll things, was sister of Hon. Abram Rencher of Pittsboro, who was the Governor of the Territory of New Mexico, but as his time out there expired when Abraham Lincoln became President, he, with his wife and two daughters, came South under a flag of truce and reached his Pittsboro home in time for his beautiful daughter, Miss Sallie, to spend Christmas with her cousin Mrs. Jones and help us out with our Christmas frolic. So you see Johnny Rosemond was "well connected". I do not remember that we had a marriage ceremony but we had a nice little party and lots of fun. In those days girls hardly knew how to play dolls till they were ten or twelve years old.

Did Santa Claus remember the little Southern children in those stormy war days? Indeed he did. What did Santa care for Lincoln's blockade? He had not been poisoned up for sixty years with Yankee propaganda. Staving through our fine Southern country robbing, burning homes, and turning women and children out with no shelter and nothing to eat, was not Santa Claus' idea of "Peace on earth and good-will to men". Even if Santa had felt the need of protection through the Yankee lines, he could prove by thousands of us that Sherman's army, some of them, had not only the strength but the will





to defy anything connected with Abraham Lincoln. My home at the close of the war being in the triangle formed by the villages of Morrisville, Cary and Holly Springs, if you would trouble to examine a map, you will see that I was surrounded by Sherman's army 90,000 strong for three weeks, while the arrangements were in progress for the surrender of our General Joe Johnston to Tecumseh Sherman - 30,000 were encamped at Cary under command of General Blair; 30,000 at Morrisville under General Logan; 30,000 at Holly Springs in charge of General Davis. These places were supposed to be the headquarters. I do not suppose enough soldiers remained at the camp in the day time "to make a quorum" for they were all over the fields, woods, yards, houses, and often down in wells. A few days after their arrival in our midst, my father, one morning was seated on the front porch talking with four or five friendly soldiers. We had a "safe guard" by this time to guard our dwelling house, but nowhere else. Pretty soon two more soldiers rode up, dismounted, hitched their horses and came in through the gate. The one in the lead very gleefully announced, "old Lincoln's dead and I am glad of it." I had just reached the front door opening out on the porch to speak to father about something. I did not believe this fellow meant what he said, neither did the others for they paid no attention to him till he came a little nearer, continuing, "He was shot and killed in Ford's Theatre in Washington last night." Then one of the men talking to father turned around and said, "Is he dead, sure enough?" By that time another squad dashed up with later news confirming the assassination of President Lincoln. My father looking very serious said, "I regret very much that anything like that should have happened." In all the three weeks among all of Sherman's big army that was the only expression of regret that I heard of the death of Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States. They seemed to have the greatest contempt for all their leaders, most especially for Abraham Lincoln. They had come



through all the South and had learned for themselves what he really was, not by any means what he is "evoluted" up to now.

The last Christmas before the close of the war our school seemed to have the right-of-way. This school was built up and owned by Mr. Rufus H. Jones. There were some boarders but most of the patronage was local. It was known as Aberfoyle Academy. Our teacher the last two years of the war was Mrs. Emma Cannon of Statesville, North Carolina, one of the finest and most highly cultured women in the State - not only a splendid teacher and fine musician but also a writer of ability. She was a regular correspondent of the North Carolina Presbyterian published at Fayetteville, North Carolina. Her poems are to be found in the "Carolina Wood Notes", a collection of poems in two volumes edited by Mrs. Mary Bayard Clark. Her "nom de plume" for her poems is Laura Linton, her mother's maiden name. Mrs. Cannon was a sister of Mrs. A. V. Pendleton, author of the famous Western North Carolina hunter's song, "The Wild Ashe Deer". So, when it came to getting up a school entertainment, we felt safe in our leader, Mrs. Emma J. Cannon. We had the usual program of recitations, dialogues, compositions, music, etc., but what seemed to cap the climax was our song, "The Homespun Dress". All the scholars knew the "Bonnie Blue Flag", but we did not know the words of "The Homespun Dress". However, luck favored us, as the next issue of the Raleigh paper contained the song in full, by Miss Sinclair of Georgia. As I had learned the notes of the "Bonnie Blue Flag", it fell to my lot to render the music of the "Homespun Dress", it being the same. The singing was done by all the girls in beautiful new homespun dresses, at least we thought them so. Were they made up in any sort of style? That they were. Our teacher had a stylish lady friend in Salisbury who managed to get through the blockade the latest fashions, and kept Mrs. Cannon and her pupils well supplied. As one specimen, my dress, which was handwoven in the loom at home





by my mother, was a mixture of lamb's wool and cotton finger-picked from the seed. The warp was of two kinds of almost invisible stripes. The filling was a stripe of dark blue and white loosely twisted together and a stripe of the same width about half an inch of small dark green and red stripes. It was made "Paroda waist" and "Beauregard sleeves" (a coat sleeve with deep cuffs). The skirt was plain. The trimming was a quantity of buttons covered with green cloth the shade of green in the dress goods, and a narrow white ruffle around the neck. All the dresses were different. One no prettier than the others. The song which was then new and the dresses to match, seemed to be very much enjoyed by the large and cultured audience. My greatest trouble before hand seemed to be in getting a suitable pair of shoes. They were not to be found for love or money. But when I appeared upon the stage I had on an elegant new pair of cloth top "gaiters" as they were called. On close inspection, the tops were made by your humble servant of father's old wedding trousers and "soled" by a skilled shoemaker in the neighborhood. Our entertainment was early in the afternoon so the people could get home before night. Some were from Raleigh and others "far away" places. Those of us who were ten, twelve and fourteen years of age at the beginning of the war were somewhat grown up in four years. There were about twenty-five scholars in all - girls from eighteen down to one little four year old girl, who, with a larger girl, recited beautifully a nice little dialogue. There were a few boys. Mrs. Cannon and Mrs. Rufus Jones were assisted by Misses Lucy and Ann Jones Whitaker, (nieces of Mr. Jones), in the decorations and in getting us ready. Miss Ann Whitaker was especially skillful in hair dressing, bobbed hair not being in style for the larger girls. We sported our new dresses through Christmas week and I suppose were very much in evidence generally. I did not have any brothers and sisters, but had lots of nice little friends to love and hope I always will.







